

The Pope's Laudato Si'

Present Truth Perspective on The Pope's Laudato Si' Encyclical

On June 18, 2015 Pope Francis released an encyclical on the environment entitled, *Laudato Si'*. The document calls for discussion and dialogue on environmental issues. Francis stated, "There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. Here I would state once more that the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good." (*Laudato Si'*, Sec 188)

A journalist at the New York Times has described the encyclical as "one of the shrewdest documents issued by the Vatican during the past century" and "has revealed Francis as a wily and sophisticated politician of the first order." (Paul Valley, New York Times, June 28, 2015, "The Pope's Ecological Vow")

While the stated intent of Francis, as head of the Roman Catholic Church, is not to "replace politics", it is evident that he most certainly hopes to rally believers who hold political power in the hope of addressing various environmental issues. These issues go far beyond a discussion of global warming. Francis states his opposition to abortion, embryonic stem cell research and population control – saying that respect for creation and human dignity go hand in hand.

"The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change." (*Laudato Si'*, Sec 13)

For Francis, that development includes the restoration of spiritual life in all of humanity, with Christ, in the form of the Eucharist, at its centre.

"The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation... Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation." (ibid, Sec 236)

As used by Francis, the Eucharist is a reference to the Catholic belief that the communion bread and wine, once blessed by the priest, becomes the actual body and blood of Christ. In this belief, the Eucharist itself is adored and worshipped as the very presence of Christ.

Unfortunately, this idea of Eucharistic worship does not have a biblical basis. Ellet J Waggoner said as much in a note on Hebrews 10:20.

"Our Sacrifice is alive forever, and his blood is ever fresh, precious, incorruptible. 1 Peter 1:18, 19. This great truth is denied by the Catholics by their doctrine of transubstantiation. They affirm that there is no sacrifice now available for man, except upon their altars, where the water and wine are turned into the actual body and blood of Christ. In that doctrine the sacrifice of Christ is not even new, but needs ever to be renewed; the body and blood need a constant re-creating. By it the contrast between the daily offerings of the old law, and the one offering of Christ, is utterly destroyed." (Ellet J Waggoner, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 11, 1890)

Alonzo Jones concurs with Waggoner in regard to the Eucharist.

"The Christian doctrine of the real presence is, 'Christ in you'.

“The Catholic theory of the real presence is, ‘Christ in the Eucharist.’

“The Christian doctrine of the real presence is, Christ in the believer by the creative power and overshadowing of the Spirit of God. The Catholic theory of the real presence is, Christ in the Eucharist by the word of the priest.

“In the Christian doctrine of the real presence there is an inward change or conversion of the soul [of] the believer [him] self by the power of the Holy Spirit, by which [he] is made a ‘new creature.’ In the Catholic theory of the real presence there is what is called an ‘inward change or conversion’ of the bread and wine, or the wafer of the communion into the very flesh and blood of Jesus Christ by the word and at the will of the priest...

“The Christian truth of the real presence of Christ converts the soul of the believer: the papal dogma pretends to convert the bread and wine. The Christian truth of the real presence of Christ believed, makes man subject to God in everything: the papal dogma makes God subject to man in everything. The preaching of the Christian truth of the real presence of Christ in the believer, is the revelation of the mystery of God: the preaching of the papal dogma of the real presence is the proclamation of the mystery of iniquity.”
(Alonzo T Jones, Present Truth (UK), July 19, 1894.)

However, what is of immediate interest to ourselves, is the next paragraph that follows the one on the Eucharist. Having established the central place of Eucharistic worship in humanity caring for the environment, Pope Francis states,

“On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world.”

In Francis’ mind, “Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the ‘first day’ of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord’s risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality. It also proclaims ‘man’s eternal rest in God’. In this way, Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity.” (Laudato Si’, Sec 237) He concludes the paragraph by stating, “And so the day of rest, centred on the Eucharist, sheds it [sic] light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.” (Ibid)

For Pope Francis, the hope of humanity rests in a return to Eucharistic worship and rest on Sunday.

The fundamental error in this vision for humanity is the fact that “the Jewish Sabbath” is biblically the only true Christian rest that God has called us to honour. The seventh-day Sabbath stands as an eternal memorial to creation and the Creator. Ordained by God as day of rest and spiritual restoration (Genesis 2:3-4), the Sabbath was made for mankind, not just the Jew (Mark 2:27). A correct knowledge of Jesus, and His work as Creator and Redeemer, is essential to appreciate the significance of the biblical Sabbath. The LORD calls it, “My holy day” (Isaiah 58:13).

The same creative power that the biblical Sabbath reminds us of is the same power that regenerates and transforms us. That power is Christ, manifested today in the Word of God. As we feed upon the Word (the Scriptures), empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are transformed.

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Note how the apostle Paul relates this change of character to God’s power in creation.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

It is the power of the Word that said, “Let there be light”, and there was light. That same power speaks to our hearts and says, “Let there be the light of the glory of God”, and there is that light. Where is it seen? “In the face of Jesus Christ.” By beholding Jesus, in His Word, we are changed into the same image. Thus, the eternal purpose of God for us is fulfilled: That all those who have responded to the Gospel call, are conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:28, 29).

In this way, the mystery of the Gospel is fulfilled, namely, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Hence, the last message to the world today involves a call to worship God as Creator:

Revelation 14:7 “...Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”

The true worship of God as Creator involves honouring Him on the day He has set aside to remember Him as Creator. Sadly, the vast majority of Christendom has forgotten that day.

While worshipping on Sunday has been a much revered church tradition, we find no biblical support for it whatsoever in the Old or New Testament Scriptures. The only day we as Christians are called to set apart is the seventh day of the week, namely Saturday.

Unfortunately, Pope Francis’ efforts to “to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development” with Eucharistic worship on Sunday at its centre will not stop with mere appeals to the heart. Prophecy indicates that the whole of Christendom will be caught up in a political drive to enforce the “mark” of Roman Catholic authority.

Sunday, as a day of rest, will be enforced upon the world. Natural disasters and cataclysmic climate events will be a major impetus in driving mankind to accept the appeals of the professed church, including legislating Sunday as the universal day of rest and worship.

Friend, we are nearer to these events than when we first believed. It is our prayer that each one of us will be found prepared for what is coming. By the grace of Christ, may we be found among that company of whom it is written, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:12)